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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000607

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SUBJECT: MAURITANIA: INTERNATIONAL CONTACT GROUP DOES A
FINAL ROUND

Classified By: CDA Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (U) The International Contact Group on Mauritania convened on September 10, 2009 in Nouakchott to consider developments in Mauritania since the finalization of the Dakar Accord's laying out the steps for a consensual return to constitutional order leading to new elections to resolve Mauritania's political crisis. Meeting under the chairmanship of AU Peace and Security Commissioner Ramtane Lamamra who was joined by Senegalese Foreign Minister Gadio, the group included visiting representatives of the Organization International de la Francophonie, the United Nations, Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Arab League. Permanent and African members of the U.N. Security Council were represented by resident Ambassadors of the U.S., China, France, Mali and the Russian Charge. The EU Presidency and Commission were represented respectively by the EU Commission. The Malian Ambassador represented the Presidency of the AU Peace and Security Commission.

12. (SBU) Activities with began with a call on President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz who welcomed the group and noted the Dakar Accord provisions for continuing support and engagement on the part of the international community. He thanked the contact group for the international community's determination to help Mauritania resolve its political crisis and that "has been done" Aziz said. He urged that friends of Mauritania focus on the future and the country's urgent needs. Commissioner Lamamra agreed with the relevance and importance of international solidarity in favor of assisting Mauritanian development assistance, the Dakar Accord called for continuing national dialogue. President Aziz insisted that he and his government had repeatedly extended a hand to the opposition but that it remained in denial over the election results and had not yet responded. Aziz hoped that the opposition would play a constructive and traditional role. Both Foreign Minister Gadio and Commissioner Lamamra urged that no effort be spared to engage the opposition and that "as the victor and head of state" Aziz had a greater responsibility to make that happen. Meeting separately with the with the President of Aziz' UPR party (and former Defense Minister) Mohamed Ould Lemine, as the representative of the political pole supporting Aziz, the contact group heard a similar analysis including assurances that the majority party had "repeatedly stated it's willingness to dialogue with the opposition." Now, Lemine asserted, was the time for the international community to honor its commitment to

Mauritania by mobilizing substantial donor development assistance.

¶3. (SBU) Meeting separately with representatives of the opposition poles signatory to the Dakar Accord, the group heard first from the RFD's Ould Moine and the FNDD's Ould Maouloud. Each offered a similar appraisal, bitterly complaining that the international community, and in particular local representatives forming the "follow up group" (groupe de suivi) were unsuccessful in getting the interim government of national unity to suppress partisan actions by senior military officers and some government agencies such as the Commission for Food Security. Each complained that they had been "pressured" to accept an unrealistically short period for electoral preparations that left their candidates seriously disadvantaged and that the international community had failed to compensate for these deficiencies with the robust electoral support and oversight they had been led to expect. Each noted that while the elections may have been technically legal, they could not consider them legitimate and did not believe that the political crisis had been resolved. Nonetheless, both of the parties expressed support for continued national dialogue with the FNDD suggesting that a good starting point would be an objective audit of the recent elections in order to draw lessons for the future.

¶4. (SBU) In closing deliberations, the group expressed satisfaction that constitutional order had been restored with the establishment of a national unity government

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and the subsequent resignation of President Abdallahi that permitted holding legal new elections as a means out of the political crisis. While rejecting the opposition's view that fraud had determined the outcome of the election, there was general regret that the opposition had yet to come to terms with the election results and that there seemed to be no real movement toward the inclusive dialogue that all sides say they want. Similarly, group members agreed with the need to mobilize development resources but feared that the GIRM did not have a realistic grasp of the time and effort that would be required.

¶5. (C) Comment: AU PSC Commissioner Lamamra and Minister Gadio likely conceived of the Nouakchott meeting as a kind of victory lap that would usefully highlight Senegal's successful support of the AU and the ICG in forcing a return to constitutional order followed by inclusive elections that passed international muster. The opposition's inability to accept its defeat coupled with the GIRM's merely prefatory attempts at inclusion dampened the celebratory mood. The ICG rightly used its final communique to urge that the inclusive national political dialogue envisioned by the Dakar Accord be undertaken as soon as possible. Also recognizing Mauritania's urgent need to refocus its attention on development governance issues, the ICG calls on donors to mobilize financial support and envisions a possible pledging conference during the first half of 2010.

¶6. (C) Comment Continued: The opposition remains in disarray following Aziz; July 18 election victory. Rotating president of the FNDD Abdel Kaddous Abeidna told Charge there remain strong divisions within the opposition on how to move forward. The RFD's Ahmed Ould Daddah and his militants continue to push for a continuation of the political crisis with protests on the street. The pivotal role of Chamber of Deputies President Messaoud Ould Boulkheir remains unclear as he had remained out of town almost constantly since his election loss. President Aziz wants him to resume his position at the head of the lower house without

using the seat to obstruct the governmental process (which Abeidna interprets as meaning Ould Boulkheir is not supposed to even say anything critical.) Ould Boulkheir has not indicated whether he will reconvene the Chamber of Deputies or recognize the government stemming from the July 18 elections. For now, Abeidna told Charge he had convinced the opposition to let Aziz "undermine himself" as he proves himself unable to meet the campaign promises he had made as the "candidate of the poor." Abeidna said that the combination rains and power shortages were already turning off many who had voted for Aziz. The lack of immediate development funding also had Aziz high-level supporters questioning whether he could deliver. Charge noted that no matter who had won on the 18th, he would have faced the same economic and environmental realities. Abeidna agreed but said, "If it had been Messaoud, there would have been more international desire to start up the aid quickly." Charge suggested the opposition needed to take the strength they built over the past year and put it to use in making the parliament an effective counter-balance to executive authority. That meant using the Assembly debates to raise the tough questions that needed answers, but not using it to create gridlock.

HANKINS